DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 358 376 CE 064 410

AUTHOR	Imel, Susan
TITLE	Education for Homeless Adults. ERIC Digest.
INSTITUTION	ERIC Clearinghouse on Adult, Career, and Vocational Education, Columbus, Ohio.
SPONS AGENCY	Office of Educational Research and Improvement (ED), Washington, DC.
REPORT NO	EDO-CE-93-136
PUB DATE	93
CONTRACT	RR93002001
NOTE	4p.
PUB TYPE	Information Analyses - ERIC Clearinghouse Products (071)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	*Adult Basic Education; *Adult Programs; *Educational Needs; Educational Strategies; *Homeless People; Models; *Program Development; Program Effectiveness; Program Implementation
IDENTIFIERS	ERIC Digests

ABSTRACT

The Adult Education for the Homeless (AEH) program was initiated with funds provided through the McKinney Act of 1987. During its first 4 years, the AEH program served over 100,000 homeless adults. In 1991, 34,000 adults participated in AEH programs in 31 states; nearly half were women. Approximately 60% of those served were between the ages of 25 and 44, and another 29% were between the ages of 16 and 24. Initially, AEH programs were based on either the development/capacity building, urban focus, services-to-women, or statewide approach. More recently, most states have tended to focus on the urban or statewide approach. Both on-site and off-site programs have been developed. The following are among the published recommendations concerning AEH program development: focus on the adult as a learner rather than as a member of a particular subgroup; use learner-centered approaches to give homeless adults the opportunity to control at least one area of their lives; use learners' life experiences as a basis for developing curricula that address the diverse experiences and characteristics of the adult homeless population; and provide access to the wide range of services needed by homeless persons by giving high priority to interagency collaboration. (Contains 8 references.) (MN)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED358376

Education for Homeless Adults
ERIC Digest No. 136

Susan Imel

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
☑ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

ERIC Clearinghouse on Adult, Career, and Vocational Education
Center on Education and Training for Employment
College of Education
The Ohio State University
1900 Kenny Road
Columbus, OH 43210-1090

CE 064 410

DIGEST
NO. 136

ERIC Clearinghouse on Adult, Career, and Vocational Education

Education for Homeless Adults

by Susan Imel

1993

EDO-CE-93-136

[My tutor] challenged me and told me, "You can do it" when I wasn't so sure. This is the best thing I've ever done for myself; I need this program – it gives me structure, and when I'm doing my school work, I'm not thinking about going off and getting high. I want to do this for me. Getting my GED will be nice of course, but this is something I can do for myself. I got my first A ever here. I still have the paper! In fact, I now have a collection of my A papers and I am going to keep them all because I am proud of them. Learner in Massachusetts Adult Education for the Homeless Program (USDE 1993, p. 8).

Homelessness in the United States continues to be a persistent and nagging social problem. Although estimates on the number of homeless people range between 500,000 and 2 million, the most widely cited figure is 600,000 (Levitan and Schillmoeller 1991; Norris and Kennington 1992.) Whatever the actual number, Norris and Kennington (1992, n.p.) observe that "the problem is taking on dimensions unimaginable a decade ago and growth in homelessness is expected to continue, especially among women and children." The inclination to dehumanize homeless persons through homogeneous characterizations masks the reality that in fact the population is diverse in nature (Sperazi et al. 1990). As a group, however, they tend to be poorly educated and impoverished: more than half did not complete high school and their monthly median income is about $100, a figure that is less than one-fourth of the federal poverty level for a single person (Levitan and Schillmoeller 1991). Due to their life circumstances, obtaining more education may be a low priority for homeless adults; most are simply trying to survive.

Many social and governmental agencies and programs have been created to address the plight of homeless persons, but it was not until the passage of the Stewart B. McKinney Homeless Assistance Act (Public Law 100-77) on July 22, 1987 that significant resources became available to support educational programs for homeless adults. Title VII-A of the McKinney Act spawned the Adult Education for the Homeless (AEH) program that provides funds for states to develop plans and implement programs for literacy training and basic skills remediation for homeless adults (U.S. Department of Education 1990). Although the McKinney Act also provides funding for job training for homeless adults, this ***ERIC Digest*** focuses on the unique and special challenges of providing adult basic education for homeless persons. It begins with an overview of the AEH program, including results from the first 4 years. Next, some characteristics of AEH programs are described. Recommendations for program development conclude the ***Digest***.

The Adult Education for the Homeless Program: An Overview

The following overview of the Adult Education for the Homeless (AEH) program is based on information from reports developed by the Division of Adult Education and Literacy (USDE 1990, 1992, 1993). When the AEH program was initiated, all states received at least $75,000 from the first-year appropriation of $6.9 million. After the second year, however, states had to compete for AEH funding. Under the competitive grant process, 30 and 31 states received funds in the third and fourth years respectively. Since its inception, funding appropriations for the AEH program have increased marginally, reaching a level of $9.8 millon in the fifth year.

During its first 4 years, the AEH program served over 100,000 homeless adults. In 1991, the latest year for which program figures are available, 34,000 adults participated in AEH programs in 31 states, a figure that represented a 42 percent increase over the number of learners (24,000) served in 1990. Most adults enter programs to fulfill one of the following objectives: to improve life skills (including parenting skills), to increase their level of employability, to develop basic skills needed to enter a training program, or to find a job. During years 2 through 4 of the program, the percentage of adults achieving these goals remained remarkably stable: approximately 9 percent either found jobs or improved their employment status, and 7 percent entered occupational training. Another 3 percent obtained a General Educational Development (GED) certificate. Approximately 60 percent of the learners served are aged 25 to 44 with another 29 percent in the 16- to 24-year-old group. Although the AEH program still serves more males than females, the number of female participants is increasing: in 1991 almost half were women.

Factors that deter successful implementation of AEH programs have appeared in a number of reports (e.g., Norris and Kennington 1992; USDE 1991, 1992; Wesselius Associates 1990). Those most frequently mentioned include (1) mobility of the learner population–many participants leave shelters or the area before completing the program; (2) shelter environments–inadequate facilities or lack of cooperation from shelter staff; (3) personal characteristics of participants that cause education to be a low priority, including the adult responsibilities of part-time work and job hunting; and (4) program limitations such as lack of child care, staff turnover, and inadequate curriculum.

Program Characteristics

Although AEH programs that provide basic and life skills instruction share some similarities with other programs funded by the Adult Education Act, they also have some distinctive characteristics. The state of Wisconsin found that the AEH program neither replaced nor competed with established programs because it reached previously unserved adults and brought them into an educational program (Wesselius Associates 1990).

Initially, states used one of the following approaches to implement the AEH program (USDE 1990):

- **Development/Capacity-Building Approach**–emphasizing program structure and model building
- **Urban Focus Approach**–designed to reach the maximum number of students in states with large urban populations
- **Services to Women Approach**–designed to meet the special needs of homeless women
- **Statewide Approach**–focusing on developing a variety of class locations and instructional techniques

Since the first year, when these approaches were initiated, most states have tended to focus on either the delivery of services in

urban areas or the statewide approach, although the other two approaches are still in use (USDE 1992, 1993).

Two basic program models have emerged from these approaches: onsite and offsite. Onsite programs provide instruction in quarters where homeless adults live and sleep, whereas offsite programs use sites frequented by homeless persons such as soup kitchens, libraries, and churches (Norris and Kennington 1992). During years 1 and 2, the Massachusetts AEH program required a one-on-one partnership between an adult education center and a homeless shelter or cluster of shelters, with partners free to determine whether instruction took place onsite or offsite. A major benefit of the partnership approach was the evolution of the instructional model due to better understanding of the "relationship between agencies with different histories, languages, priorities, and personalities" (Sperazi et al. 1990, p. 8).

To meet the range of learner needs, programs have created a host of cooperative arrangements with other social service agencies, including local literacy councils, ministerial alliances, food banks, counseling agencies, human service departments, and business and industry (USDE 1993). In Wisconsin, development of interagency linkages created a forum for shelter operators, community leaders, and educators to discuss educational needs of homeless adults and to develop strategies to meet these needs (Wesselius Associates 1990).

Life circumstances of AEH learners are such that they have many immediate needs and education is rarely among them. Thus instruction has a strong life skills emphasis in order to meet broader learner goals. The Division of Adult Education and Literacy (USDE 1992) identified successful instructional elements as "those which assist the learner in applying basic literacy skills in dealing with situations of homelessness . . . [including] life planning, family literacy, stress management, plus mastery of instruction in small, self-contained units" (p. 11).

Recommendations for Program Development

The following recommendations for program development for homeless adults based on the experiences of the AEH program have been synthesized from several sources (Norris and Kennington 1992; Sperazi et al. 1990; Wesselius Associates 1990; USDE 1990, 1992, 1993):

- Focus on the adult as a learner rather than as a member of a particular subgroup. Although it is important for program staff to understand the social and economic conditions resulting in homelessness, the teaching/learning relationship should take precedence in the educational setting.
- Use learner-centered approaches in order to provide adults an opportunity to have control over at least one aspect of their lives.
- Use learner life experiences as the basis for the curriculum or learning activities. The materials should develop basic skills while addressing the personal, social, and economic forces that create homelessness.
- Develop curricula that address the diversity of experience, age, gender, race, ethnicity, and parenting status in the learner group.
- Develop a network of instructors to facilitate the sharing of curricula and instructional materials and common experiences.
- Provide ongoing staff development focusing on such areas as literacy instruction, community resources, knowledge of homelessness issues, crisis management, and stress management.
- Cultivate a teamwork mentality that encourages AEH program staff to work with shelter staff, case workers, and other social service personnel by providing the interagency linkages to support these efforts.
- Provide access to the wide range of services needed by homeless persons by giving high priority to collaboration among agencies and programs serving adults.

Conclusion

During its brief history, the AEH program reports have documented a number of experiences and strategies that can provide valuable lessons not only to other AEH programs but also to other adult basic and literacy educators working with populations in transition. Keeton and Parker (1993) provide an example of the generalizability of the experiences of AEH programs by describing a process for creating transition teams that can be developed by any program that is helping learners move from dependency to self-sufficiency. Because AEH programs have addressed barriers not previously encountered by adult basic and literacy educators, the field has much to learn from their experiences.

References

Keeton, P. M., and Parker, J. T. "ABE: An Integral Part of Personal Transition." *Adult Learning* 4, no. 5 (May-June 1993): 15, 18-19.

Levitan, S. A., and Schillmoeller, S. *The Paradox of Homelessness in America*. Washington, DC: Center for Social Policy Studies, George Washington University, January 1991. (ED 328 759)

Norris, J. A., and Kennington, P. *Developing Literacy Programs for Homeless Adults*. Malabar, FL: Krieger, 1992.

Sperazi, L. et al. *"Finding Myself; Finding My Home." An Evaluation of the Adult Education with Homeless Persons Project*. Wellesley, MA: Wellesley College, September 1990. (ED 350 424)

U. S. Department of Education. *Education for Homeless Adults: The First Year*. Washington, DC: Division of Adult Education and Literacy, Office of Vocational and Adult Education, USDE, December 1990. (ED 329 701)

U. S. Department of Education. *Education for Homeless Adults: The 1989–1990 Report*. Washington, DC: Division of Adult Education and Literacy, Office of Vocational and Adult Education, USDE, October 1992.

U. S. Department of Education. *Adults in Transition: A Report of the Fourth Year of the Adult Education for the Homeless Program*. Washington, DC: Division of Adult Education and Literacy, Office of Vocational and Adult Education, USDE, May 1993.

Wesselius Associates. *Wisconsin Adult Education for the Homeless. Program Evaluation Final Report*. Madison: Wisconsin State Board of Vocational, Technical, and Adult Education, December 1990. (ED 335 483)

Developed with funding from the Office of Educational Research and Improvement, U.S. Department of Education, under Contract No. RR93002001. Opinions expressed do not necessarily reflect the position or policies of OERI or the Department. *Digests* may be freely reproduced.

CENTER ON EDUCATION AND TRAINING FOR EMPLOYMENT
COLLEGE OF EDUCATION
THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY
1900 Kenny Road • Columbus, Ohio 43210-1090